Executive Summary

Phase 1 - Focus Group Meetings
The South Grand Commercial District Parking Study consists of three main documents. Phase 1, completed in May and June of 2002, included several focus group meetings with individuals from resident groups and business owners from the area. These meetings helped to define some of the problems with parking, debated if there actually was a parking shortage in the area, and discussed possible solutions. The issue most often debated was the appropriateness of demolishing buildings – whether they are existing businesses fronting South Grand, or existing residential properties fronting a side street adjacent to the district.

Participants during this phase recognized that current City policies do allow for a property owner to apply for a demolition permit to demolish a building that they currently own. A demolition permit application will required a series of meetings or hearings to review the application, while also reviewing what may be proposed to be built on the property of the demolished structure. Focus Group participants recognized that this current process could result in a more random pattern of building demolitions, driven solely by individual developers or business owners. There was consistent agreement in the Focus Group meetings that if there is a clear parking shortage in the district, many participants felt that it was reasonable to demolish an individual building if it were part of a "systematic plan for solving the parking problems identified in the Business District." The goal of the Parking Study was to document a parking shortage that was claimed by the business owners, and to identify a series of solutions that could be implemented over time to remedy the parking problems.

Phase 2 – Resident, Business Owners, and Customer Surveys
The Consulting Team, equipped with the information from the Focus Group meetings and additional input from the Steering Committee, created three surveys to identify additional issues concerning the parking problems in the area. The results from the surveys and focus group sessions are available on the City's website at: **www.stlouis.missouri.org\citygov\planning\southgrand**

Residents' response to the survey was mixed, with strong feelings relating to the issue of building demolitions for the creation of more parking. The survey results showed Tower Grove East residents are more likely to support the idea of the building demolition if there is a comprehensive parking plan in place to determine how this should happen to best improve parking throughout the neighborhood. Half of Tower Grove Heights residents thought that homes should not be demolished at all, but they were more likely to back the idea should there be a comprehensive parking plan in place before buildings are demolished.

Interesting aspects of the Business Owners' Survey was the consensus that there was a parking problem, but a general low level of support for funding to create parking garages or new surface parking lots. To be fair, business owners may be more apt to support the funding for creating more parking if there was a specific project identified and specific dollar amounts to be spent to create this new parking, both of which are well beyond the scope of the parking study. Business owners already tax themselves to provide other district wide services and amenities, so it is likely if a project that was shown to be beneficial to the district were presented, the taxing district could muster support for a specific parking project.

Business owners and resident groups both agreed that the South Grand Business District should be encouraged to grow and prosper as a regional destination, and both groups generally agreed that higher density, more urban-styled development was preferred in the neighborhood. This suggests that there is agreement to build upon the clear strength of the area, where all new development builds upon the multi-story, mixed use urban

town center identity that distinguishes the South Grand Business District as being different and special, especially when compared to more conventional suburban styled strip centers or sprawl type of development that will usually feature large surface parking lots.

Phase 3 – Parking Spreadsheets

Parking Standards Comparison – City, Town Center, and Suburban

The parking study does clearly identify that there is a significant off-street parking deficit for many of the blocks in the Business District. The parking spreadsheets compare off-street parking standards used by the City of St. Louis, St. Louis County, and point in between labeled Town Center. Parking standards required by the City are low, probably so as not to cause too many historic buildings to be deemed obsolete due to a typical lack of off-street parking found in the older urban areas of St. Louis. St. Louis County parking standards are too high, since parallel parking on the street is often not available and is <u>never</u> considered as part of the parking for a commercial development in suburban areas. The City standard shows off-street parking deficits in some blocks, while the suburban parking standard shows off-street parking deficits in nearly every block. This caused a search for a more appropriate parking standard somewhere in between.

The Town Center parking standard was created for this study by the City's PDA staff working with the consulting team. The Town Center parking standard used in this study uses ratios comparing parking to commercial floor area that are slightly less than half of the mid-point between the current City parking standard and the suburban standard that is nearly universally used throughout the metro area. Conceptually, the Town Center standard blends aspects of both of these standards to create a more useful parking standard that reflects the urban nature of the South Grand Business District as it is used today. This Town Center standard does recognize the need today, in our automobile dominated culture, for higher amounts of off-street parking for commercial uses. But the Town Center standard used in this study also recognizes the nature of an urban business district where a large amount of parallel street parking is available and many patrons that live in the area may walk to the business district.

Comparison of Off-Street Parking and Parallel Parking on City Streets

In addition to comparing City, Town Center, and Suburban parking standards, the parking spreadsheets used in this study also compare the existing parking requirements with parking that is actually supplied on parking lots and on the public streets. The parking study spreadsheets show <u>off-street parking deficits</u> for many of the blocks in the business district, <u>even when adding 100% of the parallel street parking</u> adjacent to the specific block. This is the most serious situation that will need to be addressed incrementally over time.

Comparison of Current and Future Parking Needs

The parking spreadsheets document the <u>Existing Parking Statistics</u>, <u>Short Term Parking Statistics</u>, and <u>Long Term Parking Statistics</u>. The Short and Long Term Statistics correspond to the drawings of the same name. These drawings show examples or scenarios of how implementation of a variety of the proposed parking solutions could help alleviate the parking deficits in many of the blocks in the Business District. Many other scenarios are possible; the drawings show only one scenario. These drawings show that for a few blocks, <u>even the Long-Term Parking Supplied do not create enough off-street parking places to meet the Town Center parking standard</u>. Over time the best solutions to address the parking problem will become evident. As more parking is added it may be clear that the more sever parking solutions that require some building demolitions may not be needed at all. A market based cost-benefit analysis will be one of the best ways to determine how important it is to satisfy the off-street parking standard completely.

Phase 3 – Creating Parking Solutions
An outline list of possible parking solutions was submitted to the South Grand Parking Steering Committee in September of 2002. Comments from resident and business groups were developed over a two-month period, with the Steering Committee submitting written comments on the outline of parking solutions to the planning team by November 4, 2002. The general consensus of the comments was to emphasize improvements to the large parking lot at Commerce Bank as the main source of supply for the near-term parking needs for the area. The committee wants to "utilize as much as possible the existing Commerce Site for enhanced parking". Comments also included an emphasis on improvements to the other City owned lots that already exist in the area.

Reuse & Improve the Commerce Bank Lot
The usefulness of the Commerce Bank lot as the sole solution supplying all of the parking needs for the Business District is questionable. Various businesses have negotiated with Commerce Bank to lease parking spaces on this existing parking lot with little success. Prospective tenants have typically rejected this as a viable solution and gone elsewhere. Customer surveys indicate a desire for a short walking distance to businesses. For businesses west of Grand Avenue, the Commerce Bank lot is perceived as being too far away to be attractive, especially for the 31,000 square feet of vacant space in City Block 2102, which includes nearly 15,000 s.f. of vacant space in the Dickman Building. The parking solutions suggest other means to change the negative perceptions of walking down side streets, and the new smaller Commerce Bank building could also diminish the concerns of better utilizing this very large, existing parking lot. The negative perceptions to better using the existing Commerce Bank parking lot could be improved to make this existing lot better utilized. Reuse of the remaining Commerce Bank parking lot for public parking needs is the first, easiest solution to inject a large amount of parking to the northern end of the Business District and should be implemented as soon as possible. See solutions #12 & #37 and drawings on pages 34.1, 34.2, & 34.3.

Implementing Solutions Over Time
Many solutions that proposed the creation of substantial quantities of parking and also required demolition of existing buildings or increased amounts of paving behind existing buildings were greatly debated by the Steering Committee members. Steering committee opposition to an individual solution was often due to the specific parking solution drawing (specific buildings recommended for demolition, location of new parking, and/or the solution's perceived affects on adjacent uses) and not necessarily opposition to the general concept the solution proposed. The application of individual parking solutions over the long term may actually be more palletable to a large segment of the community, many of who expressed in focus group meetings conducted earlier, that selected demolitions could be acceptable "if it were part of a systematic plan for solving the parking problems identified in the Business District."

Reflecting this approach, the parking solutions provided are divided into three main groups with the intent that the Short Term Solutions be implemented first, and saving the Larger Scale Solutions for consideration for a later date. The Short Term Solutions are less expensive changes that will be easier to implement. As these solutions are implemented it may become clear that other additional solutions may be needed only to a lesser extent. Over time, it may be found that that some of the Short and Medium Term solutions provide sufficient parking in many areas of the Business District that Long Term Solutions that require building demolitions are never needed.

Parking Solutions Text
The Parking Solution text presents the proposed solution followed by comments made by the Steering Committee, Business Owners, and Residents in *italicized* text that is indented. Additional text explanation is provided after the comments to further address issues mentioned in the comments.